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**LOST CITIES AS A VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE:  
THE EXAMPLE OF PRE-EARTHQUAKE  
LISBON**

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**Introduction**

The study of a lost city is always a great challenge. The city of Lisbon destroyed by the 1755 earthquake is more than a distant memory. In fact, we are mainly in the presence of an absent memory, because it disappeared abruptly, leaving few records of its former existence.

Evidently, it is vaguely present in the districts around the castle, which were rebuilt outside of the adopted reconstruction plan. It is also perceptive through the existing fragmented and dispersed documents that survived the earthquake and Lisbon's subsequent history. However, the city centre that disappeared on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 1755 was more than a vague collection of buildings, streets and alleys reminiscent of an extended past. It was a long standing memory, consubstantiated in a lived urban and architectural setting, connecting past and present. As such, it was able to generate, as all living cities are, a dialectic relationship between its material and social dimensions. The long and significant historiography on pre-earthquake Lisbon has been shedding some light on this lost urban reality. However, it fails to clearly reveal its all-encompassing character and to enable a visual outlook of the city as a whole. The project *City and Spectacle: a vision of pre-earthquake Lisbon* was thus devised as a virtual, interactive and immersive laboratory of research on the lost city, namely early 18<sup>th</sup> century Lisbon. It aims to recreate not only the city destroyed by the earthquake, on which the reconstruction plan was carried out, but also some aspects of its daily life, through the recreation of some events such as processions, bullfights, opera performances and the infamous inquisition executions known as *autos de fé*. Its goals are the furthering of knowledge and debate on pre-earthquake Lisbon, but also the sharing of this experience with a wide audience in a context of social interaction.

This chapter will address the place of this project both in context to Lisbon's historiography as well as to the study of lost cities in general in the realm of virtual of virtual archaeology and cyberarchaeology. As such, it will analyse its scientific, pedagogical and leisure potential and its new ontological value both as a scientific venture and a sensory experience.